1. JOHN BROWN

Few of the citizens of Springfield realize that even though their city is already prominent, one of the most famous men in American history once lived, worked, and raised his family here. I speak of the man whose single act at Harper's Ferry, Virginia insighted men to think and later to work to abolish one of the most abominable conditions that prevailed in the United States--slavery! I speak, of course, of John Brown. I shall not go to great lengths extolling or condemning him for his act of October, 1859, but I shall simply tell you about this man's life in Springfield, when he was not yet so famed as an abolitionist, and perhaps at the time when he, himself, thought comparatively little about slavery.

In June, 1846, John Brown returned to New England, near his birth place in Torrington, Connecticut, in connection with his wool-growing and wool-dealing business. It seems that John Brown's mind was already troubled with injustices, for New England manufacturers had the habit of dealing mercilessly with the Ohio sheep farmers who were too far away to defend themselves. What was needed in the East was an agent, shrewd himself, who would represent the wool-growers, and see that they were never cheated. John Brown, wishing to go East to study slavery, seemed to be their man and Springfield was their city.

John Brown moved to Springfield with a Mr. Simon Perkins to establish the needed agency. Brown, perhaps even shrewder than the domineering manufacturers, with whom he had to deal, inaugerated a system, heretofore unheard of, to grade wools according to their qualities. Before this time manufacturers had paid one flat price for all wool, making huge profits while doing so. But with Brown's new plan the Ohio farmer was served very well and John Brown became a fairly well-to-do businessman, and highly respected citizen of Springfield.

John Brown had several homes while in Springfield, but perhaps the best known was his white pillared place on Franklin Street, where he lived a greater part of his time here. Another fairly well known house was

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located on the corner of what is now Ferry Street.

None of his homes in Springfield were richly decorated, and linen never appeared on the table; the family chose to live as simple Puritans, so that money saved by doing away with luxuries could be used to aid the "Underground Railway" which transported fleeing negroes to Canada and Freedom.

John Brown's wool warehouses were located close to the Old Boston & Albany Railroad tracks. Times were not always easy for him and he had much difficulty with the New England manufacturers who at one time formed an alliance not to buy any wool until the price went down. Brown, even more stubborn than they, piled wool up in his warehouses and waited. Finally, after much controversy, he was forced to sell at a loss all that he had hoarded. Although he did more than $50,000 worth of business in his first year, his profits were small.

An interesting point to note is that John Brown's two sons, John Jr., and Jason, met an enterprising negro, Thomas Thomas, at the African Church here, and they later offered him a position with their father's firm. When Thomas inquired of Mr. Brown at their first meeting what time to come to work, John Brown replied that they usually commenced at seven o'clock, but that he would like Thomas to come early, as he had something to talk over with him. Thomas Thomas did just this, and found Mr. Brown waiting shortly after five o'clock, only it was not of business that John Brown had requested to see the negro, but of the slavery situation in the United States. Before that day was over, Thomas Thomas was engaged in aiding Brown in his slavery venture. This negro very soon proved one of abolition's most valuable friends.

John Brown was described as such during his residence in Springfield, and I quote: "A quiet and peaceable citizen and a religious man." I am sure that few if any ever quessed that this "quiet citizen" of Springfield

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would ever become the vibrant and cursing man who conceived an act of violence which would bring the question of slavery to the surgace.

Towards the middle of the nineteenth century John Brown moved from Springfield and took up residence in North Elba, his last real family home. From here he went to Kansas to aid it in becoming a "Free" State, and from here he went to Harper's Ferry, a courthouse, and his death.

This simple man, "a quiet and religious" citizen of Springfield--apart from being a prominent abolitionist--was also a truly great American. A year or so after John Brown's death, Abraham Lincoln confirmed his act at Harper's Ferry by signing the "Emancipation Proclamation" freeing the slaves for whom John Brown had worked and died.

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